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anti-speciesist education

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Animal ethics is a rather novel area of practical concern and research interest within philosophy of education. In recent years, environmental and humane education, which have tended to be governed by a largely anthropocentric orientation, have been augmented by approaches with a more theriocentric, egalitarian focus: critical animal studies, critical animal pedagogy, animal standpoint theory, vegan education, and animal rights education. This essay develops a pedagogical approach inspired by the two-pronged case for animals' equal consideration, the argument from marginal cases and the argument from speciesism.

Keywords: animals, argument from marginal cases, argument from speciesism, moral equality, philosophy of education

For centuries, the only teaching and learning about other-than-human animals that took place in educational institutions happened in the medical and biological sciences and in comparative psychology, with focal areas like animal anatomy or physiology, behaviour and cognition. Since the early 1970s, animal ethics has been an influential area of scholarly concern and research among professional philosophers (see, for example, Godlovitch et al., 1971; Regan, 1983; Singer, 1975). It entered university philosophy courses as an increasingly popular study option, while humane education was introduced in numerous schools. It is all the more puzzling, then, that for the longest time the subject of non-human animals was largely ignored within philosophy of education. It is only in recent years that educational philosophers and theorists of moral education have begun to pay much overdue heed to the pedagogical implications of the psycho-physical continuity between humans and other animals (Horsthemke, 2018a, 2018b).

The case for the inclusion of other animals in the sphere of direct or immediate moral concern is as follows (see Horsthemke, 2010). Differences between 'us' and 'them' are not radical. They are gradational, differences in degree, and in many morally relevant respects humans and non-humans are relevantly similar. Animals are conscious subjects of a life that can be better or worse for them, they experience pleasure and pain, and they normally seek to avoid not only sources of pain and nociceptive stimuli but also death. They may lack full-fledged moral agency and accountability but like human moral agents, they are moved by altruism, affection, tenderness, prudence, deference, dominance, and aggression. Moreover, there are many human beings who are not full-fledged moral agents and who cannot reasonably be held (fully) morally responsible. The so-called "argument from marginal cases" (Narveson, 1977)*1* states that any criterion advanced to justify the moral demotion or exclusion of animals can also be used to justify downgrading or excluding those humans who fall short with regard to the relevant capacities, be it moral agency, rational autonomy, or being a language user. Any criterion, that is, except the criterion of 'being human'. But, according to the so-called "argument from speciesism" (Ryder, 1971; see also Horsthemke, 2010, 2015), to use species

membership as a moral demarcation is as arbitrary as citing 'being a man' or 'being white'. Given evolutionary biological and psychological kinship between the human and non-human species, speciesism is as morally questionable as sexism and racism. We thus obtain a two-pronged case for animals' inclusion in the sphere of direct or immediate moral concern, if not equality or equal moral status.

Learning about animals has been and continues to be an integral feature of education. Humans are the primary beneficiaries of studying animals, in terms of learning about their anatomy and behaviour. But pedagogical and educational encounters between humans and animals also have the potential of benefiting animals, over and above enjoying appropriate veterinary care and attention. Human beings can learn to interact and engage with other animals in morally defensible ways, to appreciate their abilities and respect their needs and interests, to coexist with them in a caring, non-invasive fashion. After having elsewhere (Horsthemke, 2018b) examined a variety of approaches that have been suggested for including the ethical treatment and moral status of animals as a pressing concern within education, and teaching and learning generally, and having made the case for an alternative pedagogy, namely animal rights education, I now discuss the possibility and promise of anti-speciesist education. The plausibility of such a pedagogy depends on two sets of considerations – one conceptual, the other practical. Is the notion of 'speciesism' meaningful? And if it is, what might an *anti*-speciesist pedagogy look like?

The first critique of the notion of speciesism[2] considered here focuses on 'distinctly human' capacities and characteristics that explain why sexism and racism are indefensible and objectionable. These practices systematically thwart or disregard these paradigmatically human traits. 'Speciesism', on the other hand, is a chimera since it does not, and cannot, involve reference to these capacities and characteristics. It focuses, rather, on 'life' and/or 'sentience' as the most important qualities shared by humans and animals. But surely, the objection goes, we do not believe that women and men, and black and white people, should be treated equally just because they are alive and/or sentient, but because they can participate fully in the whole range of human activity. In response to this objection, it might be observed that there is no single human trait that is not present at least to some degree in members of other species. Importantly, moreover, whereas some animals have these capacities, some humans do not have them, and this must surely cast doubt on their significance in establishing the purported moral relevance of species membership. Sexism and racism are wrong because women and men, and black and white persons, are denied participation in the widest possible range of human activity. (They cannot all 'participate fully in the whole range of human activity'. For example, men cannot fall pregnant and have abortions or give birth to children.) Speciesism, on the other hand, is wrong because humans and many animals are equal in that they can participate in certain activities, in that they share certain capacities that matter morally. Among these capacities is sentience. It should be noted, furthermore, that in the absence of sentience, the capacity to suffer physically (and psychologically), the questions of sexism and racism would not even arise. The labels 'sexism' and 'racism', like 'speciesism', would have no connotation.

The second kind of objection emphasizes the importance of our natural preferences, the special interests we feel in our fellow human beings (Midgley, 1983, p. 102). This objection, which emphasizes our sentimental preference for our own species and the special value we place on the lives of humans, attempts to counteract a version of the argument from marginal cases: even though it may be admitted that some humans have morally relevant capacities to a lesser degree than some animals, it is nonetheless justifiable to give preference to the former, simply on the grounds that they belong to our (human) species. It is because we feel a certain responsibility for these members

of our species, and because animals manage very well on their own and do not require special care from us, that animals do not matter as much as these human beings, and humans generally. Now, although sentimental preference and natural feelings of sympathy for other human beings are prominent and, indeed, important in moral thinking, it is certainly not unreasonable if I feel a greater obligation to Donald the duck than to Donald the erstwhile US president, to my dingo than to Rosemary's baby, or to an escaped budgerigar than to an escaped burglar. The point is that although feelings are significant in that a certain affective capacity (for sympathy, protectiveness, and the like) might be necessary for the apprehension of moral values, of who and what matters morally, the moral status of those affected by our actions does not depend on our feelings towards them.[3] Significant though they may be, feelings and sentiments, even those for other humans, do not constitute the entirety of morality. Preference for, and the desire to extend special care to members of our own species, motivated by feelings of sympathy, protectiveness, and the like, does not invalidate the argument from speciesism. Similarly, the fact (if it is a fact) that we give preference to humans closer to us (both geographically and biologically), similarly motivated by feelings of sympathy or a greater possibility of 'identification', does not invalidate the respective cases against xenophobia, racism, sexism, etc.

The third critique of the argument from speciesism to be examined here stresses the scientific, biological importance of differentiating between species (see Midgley, 1983, pp. 98–99, 101). In response to this position, it might be pointed out that the argument from speciesism does not hold that all interspecies differences are morally irrelevant. It says, rather, that where we are dealing with 'like' capacities, shared by humans and animals, ignoring the moral weight of those of animals, simply because they are not members of the species *homo sapiens*, betrays moral bias and has yet to be justified. If race in humans is not a significant grouping but species in animals is, the question is in what way it is significant: biologically? Or also morally? Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that its biological import can non-controversially be established. It is the sudden move from 'biological' to 'moral' that is questionable, and it is unclear as to what might count as excellent reasons for the unequal consideration and treatment of animals. If two species (by definition) exhibit *different* lines of descent this does not mean that they are *unequal*. The possibility of classification does not suggest inequality. The idea of equality, in this sense, is more than a liberalist sentiment. It reflects a contingent fact of natural history – 'contingent', because there could have been a radical difference in kind between human beings and non-human life, as there may be between us and extraterrestrial organisms. Yet, even in the latter instance, 'inequality' would not automatically follow. It would have to be shown why, and to what extent, whatever it is that makes the difference is *morally relevant*, that is, also makes a *moral difference*. But, returning to the possibility of classification, the grouping of individual organisms into species and of species into 'higher' taxa is hardly uncontroversial and unequivocal. There are several equally valid ways species might be identified, each serving a different legitimate need of biologists. It is not the case that species are unreal; only that they lack *essential* properties, and that their members cannot be distinguished by some privileged identity relation. Thus, if the selection of what might be called 'diagnostic' features is arbitrary, scientifically or biologically, then the drawing of moral conclusions from such a selection can be no less arbitrary. Indeed, giving greater moral weight to the owner or subject of one (set of) feature(s) over another, where these (sets of) features are *alike*, seems to be doubly arbitrary.

The final objection to the argument from speciesism considered here emphasizes the ineliminability of the human point of view (for humans). The crucial point is the following. Species membership is generally considered to be morally significant and relevant, unlike race and sex membership, simply

because our *moral* point of view, our point of view as moral agents, is a *human* point of view. And we cannot but view our dealings with other species from our perspective, which happens to be human, just as a lion's perspective – were he a moral agent – would be inescapably and ineliminably leonine. However, it would seem that this argument against the notion of speciesism is advanced from within a speciesist framework and is, ultimately, question-begging. Consider the logical force of the assertion that being "in favour of humanity … is not a prejudice", because human beings are "the most valuable or important creatures … to human beings" (Williams, 1985, p. 118). This not only remains unsubstantiated but is, in fact, already prejudiced. Or should Williams be understood as presenting as a (presumably ineliminable) fact that human beings attach most value to other human beings, and that any moral system that tries to overcome this entirely is fighting a lost battle and risking irrelevance?[4] Although our moral point of view can never be non-human, it is not absurd to assume that the impersonal point of view we adopt to review our relations to other humans also provides a vantage point for reviewing our relations with the rest of the biosphere and, especially, other animals. It is not absurd to maintain that common goals of morality are more readily achieved by extending "equal consideration … to everything that could receive consideration" (Williams, 1985, p. 118). Even if there are reasons for exhibiting *dissimilar* moral commitment to human beings than to animals, these do not connote *inequality*, let alone exclude moral relations between humans and animals. Humans do not exist naturally in isolation from other species. Certainly, the character of a creature's interests, and what the ethical implications are, depends on the (biological) kind of creature it is. Yet, the view that *mere* difference in species counts for anything is hardly plausible, even from a human perspective.

Anti-speciesist education will have as its main objective counteracting or undoing speciesist indoctrination that children are exposed to from an early age: that animals exist for our (human, superior) benefits, to be eaten, worn, dissected, experimented upon, hunted, fished, trapped, kept in zoos, ridden, raced, owned, and used for recreational purposes. At the same time, anti-speciesist education will build on and foster children's natural interest in and feeling for animals. Most children tend to see the world as 'ensouled' and have little difficulty imagining it as existing devoid of human beings (see Melson, 2001; Waldau, 2011, pp. 148–151). They are profoundly concerned with and connected to animals, and this is an important feature in children's moral development. Animals could be seen as catalysts for the development of morality, a notion of mind, a sense of self that has life-long implications, and for the learning about what it means to be alive. Animals provide a vibrant sense of vitality. The natural bonds between them and children, and animals' qualities that they share with human beings and that differ from humans', are important factors in children's development of a concept of self and of the 'other', and of the ability to empathize, sympathize, and care.

As parents and as educators, especially, it is important to remember that we, too, have not only grown but changed, undergone some kind of transformation. We (or at least some of us) are no longer who we used to be. Almost all of us were once indoctrinated into consuming meat and other animal products, and some of us might have dissected animals in school and even experimented on living animals in university laboratories. Some of us may have hurt and even killed animals. It is important to signal to children, learners, and students that, while it is not possible to undo the wrongs we and they have committed, they are not alone in their moral struggles with their changing identities. Such facilitation can happen through informal discussion forums, offering vegan food options in school canteens and lunchrooms, as well as alternatives to dissection in school science labs, and also through making available information about the lives and deaths of animals, about alternatives to the use of animals in a wide variety of contexts, and thereby enhancing children's,

learners', and students' capacities for empathy, sympathy, and critical reflection and engagement. Helping them to make *educated* decisions about their own lives, and to act on their decisions, is arguably the most generative way of making what is left of our planet a better place, also (and importantly) for other animals.

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1. Jan Narveson is critical of this argument. See also Horsthemke (2010, 2018b).
2. See Scruton, 2000, pp. 1–2. Many objections have been raised with regard to both the notion of speciesism and the legitimacy of the argument from speciesism. I list only three representative philosophers here: Mary Midgley (1983), Roger Scruton (2000) and Bernard Williams (1985, 2006). For a more comprehensive overview, see Horsthemke (2010).
3. It might be pointed out that there is a non-ideal sense of moral status that ties it to feelings or preferences. Without being able to go into detailed argument here, I worry about the proximity of this approach to a thorough-going (personal and/or cultural) relativism, which I take to be indefensible (see Horsthemke, 2015, pp. 54–62).
4. This is one of the many helpful suggestions made by Anders Schinkel in his comments on this essay.